



HYPOTHERMIA

What is it ?

Hypothermia is a lowering of the body's temperature to abnormally low temperatures. **Death may result.**

How is it caused ?

Hypothermia is caused by exposure to cold and is intensified by wetness, wind and exhaustion.



How can you tell if someone is suffering from it?

Hypothermia is a progressive condition, however death from exposure can be very rapid. Every member of the party should be alert for the signs. Some or all of these symptoms may be present:

Initial signs:

pallor and shivering
poor co-ordination
fatigue

Advanced signs:

decrease in shivering
slurred speech
irrational behaviour
hallucinations
collapse and coma
death

How can it be avoided ?

The best defence against hypothermia is to avoid exposure:

Stay Dry: when clothing is wet it loses approximately 90% of its insulating value and drains heat from the body. Unlike cotton, down and most synthetics, wool will retain most of its insulating value when wet. Modern "fibrepile" fabrics also retain heat very well when wet.

Be aware of the wind: even a slight breeze carries heat away from the body, and forces cold air under as well as through clothing. Wind intensifies cold by evaporating moisture from the surface.

Use proper clothing: wear raingear when necessary and put it on before getting wet. Use wool clothing and add layers to it before shivering occurs. Hats, preferably wool, should be worn to help retain body heat, over half the body's heat may be lost through an unprotected head at two degrees celsius.



Carry a good supply of high energy foods (such as chocolate or barley sugar) to give the body fast energy.

Always carry an emergency protection bivvie bag (approximately 2.5m x 1.25m [8 foot x 4 foot] polythene or other weather proof material) for each party member.



How can it be treated ?

If initial symptoms of hypothermia (shivering, poor co-ordination and fatigue) are detected action must be taken immediately. Stop exposure. Do not keep walking. Immediate treatment is required. Get out of the wind and rain. If possible, remove wet clothing and apply dry clothing. Get victim into a sleeping bag. Another person in the bag will help increase the warmth more rapidly. Warm sweet drinks such as milo will help restore body heat. Only build a fire or start a fuel stove after heat loss at the skin surface has been stopped.



DO NOT : Massage or rub parts of the body

Give alcohol

Give coffee or tea

Give cigarettes

Warm skin by a fire

These remove heat from the body's core and can be fatal.

If advanced symptoms become evident follow the same treatment as before to stop further body heat loss. Transferring body heat in a sleeping bag through skin to skin contact is the most effective and efficient method of treatment. If breathing stops give mouth to mouth resuscitation. Maintain close observation of the patient until consciousness is regained. Even after the patient is on the road to recovery it is necessary to treat him/her as a "stretcher case" and to seek medical advice as soon as possible.

The victim may deny that he/she is in trouble. Believe the signs you see not the patient.

Do not hesitate to stop and make camp if inclement weather should appear. However if exposure to wind, cold and wetness does occur, remember that anyone, regardless of fitness and experience can slip into hypothermia.